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Contribution of regional meetings in Latin America and the Caribbean to the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

Summary

Three regional meetings have been held in Latin America and the Caribbean to debate and analyse the situation of human settlements, water and sanitation in the region in order to contribute to the deliberations of the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development on these three thematic issues. Summaries of the outcomes of the three meetings are given in the present document.

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I. Introduction

1. Three regional meetings have been held in Latin America and the Caribbean to debate and to analyse the situation of human settlements, water and sanitation in the region in order to contribute to the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development. Taking into account the fact that the Commission will now function on the basis of two-year "implementation cycles", including review and policy years, the Regional Implementation Meeting in Latin America and the Caribbean is planned for 2004, in preparation for the Commission's policy year (2005), to address possible measures to speed up implementation and mobilize action to overcome obstacles and constraints. Summaries of the outcomes of the three meetings are given below.

II. Joint meeting of the XII General Assembly of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector of Latin America and the Caribbean Countries and the VIII Ibero-American Forum of Ministers and High-level Authorities of the Housing and Urban Development Sector

2. The meeting was chaired by the Minister of Economic Development of Bolivia, Mr. Javier Nogales Iturri, and attended by representatives of 11 countries of the region, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and organizations of the United Nations system.

3. According to the report entitled "Impact of the deceleration of economic growth on urban development and housing: human settlements and basic services, land and housing exclusion", the sustainability agenda has gradually exerted an influence on institutions, public policies and management practices of the countries of the region. Progress in this field has been marked by the introduction of an institutional and social platform better than that which existed 10 years ago at the time of the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development in 1992. In addition, the concept of sustainable development has been incorporated into education programmes and the change in the social perception of environmental problems has strengthened public awareness and commitment.

4. Despite such positive achievements, sustainability is still not an integral part of the development process. The main bottlenecks in this area are of an institutional and financial nature, and have led to the perception of environmental sustainability as a cost rather than an opportunity. For this reason, a change of attitude with regard to the development of a new agenda to strengthen the relationship between environmental sustainability and economic development is indispensable.

5. On the other hand, it is recognized that the spatial specificity of environmental management requires the establishment of solid operative links with local authorities. The solution of high-priority environmental problems, including management of water resources and solid waste and sustainable land use and urban management, demands the decentralization of environmental policies and instruments as well as a more balanced distribution both of the public and private expenses at the national and local levels. It is at the local level that the commitment

between the State and citizens take shape, which explains the importance of strengthening local agreements on the agenda of sustainability, in particular focusing on developing local versions of Agenda 21. Such agendas could be powerful instruments for the channelling of new resources for the promotion of environmental sustainability at the national and subnational levels.

6. The main challenges faced by the region in implementing human settlements commitments and targets were presented, including: insufficient financing for housing and urban services; availability of land; weak institutional framework; and lack of environmental awareness in both the private and public sectors. The Forum adopted the La Paz Declaration,[1] in which the Ministers reaffirmed the goals and commitments agreed to at the Millennium Summit towards poverty eradication, specifically in the area of human settlements, by eliminating inequality in access and legal security of land holding as well as housing and urban services, reducing the region's vulnerability to natural disasters and adopting an integrated management of water resources. The Declaration recognizes that the analysis of the principal social, economic and environmental issues as well as the challenges to, and opportunities for, sustainable development in the region prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean identifies regional priorities in the area of human settlements. The adoption of the Declaration signalled that the Latin American and Caribbean region preparatory process for the twelfth session of the Commission enjoys the support of these authorities. The report of the meeting is available online.[2]

III. International seminar on the analysis of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development

7. The seminar, which was co-organized by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean and the Government of Spain, was held at the headquarters of the Commission in Santiago on 17 and 18 November 2003. Representatives of countries of the region, a member of the bureau of the Commission on Sustainable Development from Latin America and the Caribbean and representatives of the United Nations system, subregional organizations and NGOs attended the meeting. The seminar took stock of the outcomes of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in terms of their implications for the region, covering a range of issues related to energy, freshwater and biodiversity. Regional features and challenges were also identified for discussion at the twelfth session of the Commission in April 2004.

8. The first session of the seminar was dedicated to an evaluation of the results of the Johannesburg Summit. The seminar noted that the Platform for Action agreed upon at the Latin American and Caribbean Preparatory Conference for the Johannesburg Summit, as an element of the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, was adopted by a regional political consensus on sustainable development issues and was, at the same time, the starting point for the elaboration of the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development. The Santiago seminar highlighted how the Latin American and Caribbean regional perspective on sustainable development was reflected in the Rio de Janeiro Platform for Action and in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, where regional initiatives had been given extensive recognition.

9. The issue of financing for environmentally sustainable development of the region was examined. The increasing importance of this topic has been reflected in three recent global summits and conferences: the Millennium Summit, the International Conference on Financing for Development and the World Summit on Sustainable Development. Financing for development is one of the main themes and challenges for the developing world, and one of the most prominent on the regional agenda, owing to the fact that one of the main unresolved problems in Latin America and the Caribbean is how to guarantee a permanent and stable flow of resources for the application of development policies, including those for sustainable development. Efforts in the region to identify sources of financing, as well as how to link the issue of financing for development to sustainable development strategies, were discussed in detail.

10. At the session dedicated to biodiversity, the goal established in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation and the difficulty in bringing about its achievement was discussed. In spite of the difficulties in achieving such a specific goal, it was nevertheless considered to be a positive result of the World Summit, given the outstanding political relevance of the issue. In addition, taking into account the rich biodiversity of the Latin American and Caribbean region, the seminar highlighted the importance given in the Johannesburg Plan to the distribution of the benefits generated by biotechnology to local communities and pointed out the need to establish new linkages and promote existing synergies among the different multilateral environmental and sustainable development agreements.

11. At the session dedicated to the issue of energy for sustainable development, attention was focused on the impetus that Latin America and the Caribbean, together with Europe, have given to the development of renewable energy and its potential. In this regard, the political results of the regional conference held in Brasilia in October 2003, preparatory to the International Conference for Renewable Energies, to be held in Bonn in 2004, were discussed. Among the results underlined was the commitment of the countries of the region to establish a quantitative goal of attaining a certain proportion of renewable energy in the total primary supply of energy of each country in the region.

12. At the session dedicated to water resources, the importance of the linkage between national strategies for development and integrated water resources management was underscored. In this regard, actions for the more efficient use of resources in environmental, social, and economic terms are required. The seminar also considered the need for cooperative management of transboundary water resources and called for attention to the issue of freshwater supply in small island developing States of the region (in particular, certain countries of the Caribbean) and the importance of linking the results of the Johannesburg Summit to the review of the Barbados Programme of Action for the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States being undertaken during 2004.

13. Throughout the seminar, the importance of identifying a regional perspective on the sustainable development process was pointed out. At the Rio Conference in 1992, there was a consensus that in facing sustainability challenges, countries should "think globally and act locally". The Johannesburg Summit took a step forward ahead in demonstrating that the bridge between thinking globally and acting globally is regional coordination. Moreover, the Johannesburg Plan of Action reinforced the role that the regional organizations, including the United Nations

regional commissions, play in promoting sustainable development at the regional level.

14. A CD-ROM, which includes the presentations and other resources presented at the seminar, can be accessed on the Internet.[3]

IV. Fourteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean

15. The objective of the Fourteenth Meeting of the Forum of Ministers of the Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Panama City from 20 to 25 November 2003, was to develop a strategy and priority lines of action (i.e., access to genetic resources and fair and equitable sharing of benefits arising from their utilization; water resources; human settlements, vulnerability and land-use planning; renewable energies; trade and environment; economic instruments and fiscal policy; climate change; and environmental indicators) based on the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development, which was approved at an extraordinary meeting of the Forum of Ministers held within the framework of the World Summit on Sustainable Development in 2002.

16. The Forum of Ministers of Environment of Latin America and the Caribbean was attended by 27 government delegations from countries of the region and from six observer countries. In addition, 29 international, regional and subregional organizations and NGOs attended the meeting.

Decisions of the Forum of relevance to the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development

17. The Fourteenth Meeting of the Forum adopted the Regional Plan of Action for the 2004-2005 biennium and stressed the need to implement the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development, recognizing that the Regional Plan of Action is a fundamental tool for the gradual implementation of the Initiative.

Water resources

18. In view of the fact that in the ministerial statements at the eleventh session of the Commission on Sustainable Development priority was given to the topic of water during the 2004-2005 biennium and that the World Summit on Sustainable Development reaffirmed the target in the Millennium Development Goals to halve, by 2015, the proportion of people who do not have sustainable access to safe drinking water and sanitation, the Forum decided to make the theme of water and access to water resources a priority for the Latin American and Caribbean region for the 2004-2005 biennium

19. The Forum, noting that the Latin American and the Caribbean region contains one third of the planet's water resources, which makes water the region's most valuable natural resource, and recognizing that some countries are facing declining water resources and have problems in water distribution, especially in the small island developing States, decided to reaffirm the above-mentioned target of the Millennium Development Goals by promoting initiatives for integrated management of water resources through the concept of watershed management by all the member

countries of the Forum in order to increase national and regional capacities, including a guarantee of the active participation of all stakeholders, in particular through the creation of watershed councils or local management bodies and workshops. The Forum also decided to adopt friendly and accessible technologies that will foster sound water use and sanitation, thereby preventing water loss and pollution.

20. The Forum further decided on the adoption of integrated planning approaches, taking into account the linkages between land use, watershed and coastal zone management, especially for the small island developing States of the Caribbean.

Health and environment

21. The Forum, considering that the theme of environment and health is an integrated and vital part of sustainable development and that it was included in the eight priority areas of the Latin American and Caribbean Initiative for Sustainable Development and highlighted in the Johannesburg Plan of Implementation, decided to continue providing support to key regional and subregional mechanisms, with the participation of all the countries that are members of the Forum, and to encourage collaboration among all the countries of the region.

22. The report of the Fourteenth Meeting, containing all of its deliberations and decisions, including those of relevance to the twelfth session of the Commission on Sustainable Development, are available on the Internet.[4]

Notes

[1] http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd12/La%20Paz%20Declaration%20Minurvi%20ing.pdf.

[2] http://www.un.org/esa/sustdev/csd/csd12/Informe%20Foro%20MINURIV%202003%20ing.Pdf.

[3] http://www.eclac.cl/ddsah.

[4] http://www.pnuma.org/panama.